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A Case Study of Kwale District Community Water Supply and Sanitation Project, Kenya

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INTRODUCTION

Africa is at present gripped in an economic crisis. One indicator of this crisis is the debt burden which has reached such proportions that many countries are unable to service let alone repay their debt. Another indicator of Africa's crisis is the declining export earnings as compared to the cost of imports. The high rate of population growth in many African countries only goes to compound the already grave situation.

Almost without exception therefore African Governments are faced with the difficult task of raising sufficient funds to finance development projects or sustain public services at the required level. The situation is such that no African Government can afford to tell its people to sit back and wait for the government to carry out all the required development projects or provide all the required services. The people themselves must be involved. In other words, for Africa to lay a firm foundation for its recovery the one resource which African countries have in abundance, i.e., the people, must be brought in, motivated and encouraged to play their full part in the development process.

Motivating the people and encouraging them to be development agents rather than consumers in the development process calls for innovation and a new vision on the part of leaders, development planners and decision-makers. It will also call for a clear perception of the social dynamics operating within the target communities. The key to success in achieving effective public participation is to make the people right from the beginning feel that the project in question is their project and not a project brought in from outside. The people must therefore be involved right from the beginning in identifying the community need and in designing the project to satisfy that need.

Kenya is one of the few countries in Africa where, through the Harambee movement, people's participation has taken root and has made a major contribution in the development process. There are in Kenya Harambee projects in almost all spheres of community life. There are Harambee schools built and managed by the people themselves. At one time, there were more pupils in Harambee schools than there were in public schools. There are Harambee health clinics, Harambee churches and roads built under Harambee effort. There are many Harambee water projects supplying large rural communities with domestic water. There are many agricultural projects including cattle dips, irrigation schemes built through Harambee effort.

Since independence the one lesson which leaders and planners have learned is that the Harambee projects which succeed are those which were conceived and planned with full participation of the community. In fact, in many cases government officials, donors or other specialists were brought in to provide special service only at the invitation of the people who were the initiators and implementators of their own project.

In response to this initiative by the people and in recognition of the important contribution to development made by the Harambee movement, the Government has not only given its full support but has also made it quite clear that it regards the Harambee movement as an essential element in the development process. Over the years, what has evolved is a situation of mutual co-operation between government and the people in planning, executing and managing many projects. As a rule, in this co-operation the community has identified their need and suggested a solution. The Government has then come in to provide expertise in planning and set the guidelines for execution and management. The community provides the labour and management for the completed project. Where, as in many cases, funds were required from a donor agency, this was channelled through the Government.

The introduction by the Kenya Government of the District Focus for the Rural Development Strategy in 1983 was a major and a positive move intended to bring decision-making and development planning closer to communities at the grass-roots level. The strategy emphasizes the need to plan for the people by involving them in the process right from the start.

A case study of Kwale District community water supply and sanitation project

The Kwale District community water supply and sanitation project (KWDP) was initiated in 1985 as part of the Kenya-Sweden rural water supply programme to be implemented by the Government of Kenya.

A. Programme objectives

The long-term programme development objectives were as follows:

- To assist rural communities (and in particular, women and children) throughout Kwale District with provision of clean and sufficient drinking water, adequate facilities for sewage disposal, hygiene education, and overall general improvement of public health;

- To establish a programme comprising integrated, well co-ordinated water supply, sanitation, community liaison, health education and training activities;

- To establish an effective District-based programme implementation team staffed entirely by nationals;

- To integrate programme activities into existing district and sub-district administrative structures, thus strengthening existing institutions;

- To promote and develop a wide range of skills both within the programme implementation team and the communities themselves.

B. Project objectives

The operational objectives of the KWDP, in support of the long-term programme objectives, are the following:

- Establishing a District-based administrative system mainly comprising an implementation team with core staff from Ministries of Water Development, Health, Culture and Social Services and Kenya Water for Health Organization (KWAHO), which is a non-governmental organization. The implementation team should capably respond to requests from organized communities for assistance in the co-ordination of point source water supplies. This objective will be achieved through emphasis on:

  . National staff in all implementing team positions, including key management posts;

  . Least possible involvement by external advisors in day-to-day management and supervisory matters;

  . Innovative management techniques and staff training opportunities;

  . The implementation team being allowed to develop at a rate reflecting its own accummulated experience rather than being overly dependent on expatriates.

- Establishing a District-administered system that capably responds to requests from institutions and families for technical assistance in connection with construction of improved latrines.

- Establishing a workable legal and financial framework in which rural communities can participate in the implementation and ongoing maintenance of their own point source water supplies and improved latrines.

- Assisting organized villages in Kwale District in construction and ongoing maintenance of their own simple point source water supplies, tentatively estimated at 440 serving a population of approximately 82,000.

- Completing the rehabilitation of four existing rural piped water schemes in Kwale District.

- Assisting organized villagers in Kwale District in the construction of 130 demonstration latrines (subsequently increased to 200).

- Promoting further construction of latrines by interested institutions and families, through health education, provision of squatting plates and possibly vent pipes with fly traps at cost, and as appropriate, either provision of technical assistance on request and/or sponsorship of training of primary health care trainers (PHTs), community development assistants (CDAs) and local artisans in construction techniques and directly related activities.

- Establishing a solid foundation on which the next phase of the programme (a careful expansion) will be based.

- Creating amongst government, non-government and donor agencies involved in the water supply/sanitation sector, an increased awareness of possible methodologies and approaches that may be applied in self-help rural development projects.

- Establishing a model rural water supply/sanitation project with activities that can be replicated in other areas of Kenya.

C. Project philosophy

The most important ingredients in the philosophy on which the project is based are:

(a) Limited area(s) of activity for main construction components (so as to facilitate community liaison, planning and supervision) activities, as well as cost control;

(b) Provision of assistance to organized communities that have expressed desire and shown commitment to participate in project activities;

(c) Community participation in project activities - planning and design to the greatest extent possible, financing, construction, maintenance and repair, and subsequently, project evaluation;

(d) Simple suitable technologies that allow for ongoing community-based maintenance and repair of point water source supplies and latrines to the greatest extent possible.

D. Project implementation

The Ministry of Water Development is the main implementing agency in partnership with the Ministries of Health, Culture and Social Services, Kenya Water for Health Organization (KWAHO), donor agencies mainly SIDA and the local communities.

KWAHO is a non-governmental organization which advocates the provision of safe water for the rural poor and health education to eradicate diseases. It functions on the premise that women are a latent force for change that the communities they represent can, through dialogue, find the solution to their own problems and can with institutional support, implement the measures advocated.

KWAHO also considers local community organization as best adopted for carrying out developmental work and that health and hygiene should be built upon the access to safe and clean water and follow, not precede its implementation. In accordance with these principles, among others, KWAHO spearheaded the move towards the provision of water for all through community mobilization and inter-agency collaboration.

The role of KWAHO in the project

The role of KWAHO in the project is to provide the link between the technology and the people. Previous efforts in hand-pump projects including the South Coast hand pump testing project, which was part of the global UNDP/World Bank Hand Pump Testing Programme, had failed. These projects had completely covered people's wells and installed hand pumps that could not be repaired when they broke down. People eventually had to dig new wells. At the beginning also, the Kwale project had focused primarily on technology, installation and development with technicians bestowing community participation on people. As became obvious later, the committees which were constituted by the water technicians were not based on an understanding of local social organization, were controlled by land owners and were not clear about their roles and responsibilities in project implementation. The problem of community participation emerged. The project management acknowledged this problem and commissioned a study. The study called for the project to bring in a new partner skilled in community organization for self-help water system. The work of KWAHO, which became that partner, motivated village women and men to organize themselves into water committees, raise money for maintenance of pumps and become trained in pump repairs. It provided that community involvement was not only possible but worthwhile.

The KWAHO approach to community participation

The method elaborated by KWAHO in its approach to community participation has the following general pattern (A. Kassam, 1989):

1. Identification and planning

(i) Initial contact with the locational authorities and communities and community elders to propose project preliminary discussions with the members of the community;

(ii) Social survey to gather information on community in project area;

(iii) Discussion of roles and responsibilities of the community, election of community leaders to be represented in the water committees, formation of water committees, registration of water committees with government ministries of culture and social services and water development;

(iv) Project siting team comprising of representatives from Ministries of Water Development, Health, Culture and Social Services. KWAHO mobilization staff and village committee, location of water point selected by community, discussion of land issues if any and agreements made, water committee signs agreement with the Ministry of Water Development;

(v) Follow up on discussions held and organization of committees to begin collecting funds and bank accounts opened, land agreement signed, trainees for future operation and maintenance of facilities identified.

2. Implementation and training

KWAHO staff assist ministries of water development and health staff in the:

(i) Mobilization of community work force to collect materials and provide labour;

(ii) On-site training for hand-pump caretakers;

(iii) Installation of water point by Ministry of Water Development and KWAHO trainees, where relevant;

(iv) Installation of VIP latrines by Ministry of Health with assistance of members of community;

(v) Training in health and hygiene, training in community administration (book-keeping, report writing, leadership);

(vi) Initiating a gradual hand-over process;

(vii) Formal hand-over of facilities to community.

3. Monitoring and evaluation

The progress made by the communities is monitored by the evaluation team. The team members also give moral support to the communities and undertake participatory evaluation with community members.

E. Project procedures

One of the main objectives which have strong bearing on project procedures is the need to develop a programme consisting of integrated well-co-ordinated water supply, sanitation, community involvement, health education and training activities. Logically, the strategy therefore is to integrate efforts from the various partners using water component as the entry point for the interventions since the rural population in Kwale District experience great hardship in water supply.

According to project procedures, after the preparation of the medium-term plan, the first step in implementation is to carry out a community analysis. At this stage, the project staff and other local-level partners collect data on the present situation as regards the water supply and sanitation. A public meeting (baraza) is convened to serve as a forum for both the members of the community and project staff.

Community mobilization

The KWAHO model for field operations is an innovative one which has been evolved based on modes of community organization associated with the concepts of self-help (Harambee, a Swahili term meaning literally 'to pull together' and cost-sharing) through which the people contribute towards development project by raising the required sum of money with the help of local and government leaders.

In response to President Kenyatta's independent call for Harambee, that is working together to build the nation, a lot of community development projects have been started. Harambee, as a concept, embodies ideas of mutual assistance, joint effort, mutual social responsibility and community self-reliance (Mbithi, et al, 1977). Accordingly, the participation of individuals in self-help projects is guided more by the principle of collective good than individual gain. KWAHO's approach to community mobilization is founded precisely on this principle of social solidarity. By using this essentially grass-root approach in its initial contact with the communities and by channelling its programme of assistance to the community using traditionally accepted methods of dialogue and action KWAHO has thus succeeded in reaching the people it is attempting to serve. It also ensures that the wishes of the people themselves are respected and also that they identify fully with the innovations being made for their own good.

F. Project achievements and impact

The Kwale expanded programme covers an area of 8,250 km^2 with a population of 46,750 people. The project has a total of 74 technical staff, 16 social staff, 5 health staff and 109 trained village pump caretakers. The new water installation include 146 boreholes with hand pumps, 23 spring captures, 17 rain water tanks, 1 dam and 96 demonstration latrines.

Evidence from evaluation activities reveal that besides building water systems and demonstration latrines, the project has had in the process of its implementation profound impact at the village, government, NGO and donor levels.

Effective and sustained utilization

At the village level, the economic and social impact of effective and sustained utilization is easy to discern. In areas where pumps have been installed and are being utilized, women consistently express relief and gratitude at not having to walk long distances to fetch water of questionable quality to the home.

Encouraged and supported by the approach of KWAHO extension workers women have utilized increased availability of time and water for horticulture. Water groups have increasingly branched off into a variety of economic activities including poultry keeping, processing of bika (red oxide) and production of khanga (cloth). This has, in turn, increased cash contributions towards pump maintenance and the probability of its long-term survival.

Despite problems in achieving complementarity of water and sanitation, uneven hygiene education related to water handling and use of water facilities, a dramatic decline in morbidity has been reported. Health statistics for Kwale District, based on out-patient clinic visits, show a clear and consistent decline in diarrhoea diseases "from 34,042 out-patient visits in 1984 to 19,420 in 1986. The cause of the decline in diarrhoea diseases is not known", (Annual Report Health Information System District Report, 1986 p.12).

Despite inconclusive causuality, the trend is clear. Statistics from Kuhaka Health Centre in the project area indicate a 50 per cent decline in diarrhoea and 71 per cent decline in skin diseases between 1985 and 1987.

Dynamic problem-solving capacity (sustainability)

At the village level, this has been instituted through the 135 user-created and user-supported water committees. These committees have become increasingly autonomous in functioning. They have elected leaders, collected local materials for construction, helped in pump installation, collected money for pump maintenance and have undertaken pump repairs. In brief, there are:

- 135 village water committees;
- all collect cash;
- all have women treasurers;
- families pay Ksh 1 to 10 per month;
- totals range from Ksh 200 to 13,000;
- 70 per cent have opened bank accounts;
- all pumps are functioning;
- committees have repaired pumps.

Both men and women have gained confidence in themselves and in each other. This is evidenced by increased respect for women and their acceptance in public decision-making. Young female extension workers are accepted and listened to with respect even by older men and women in a predominantly Moslem society. The importance of women as pump caretakers and on decision-making committees is appreciated and supported by communities. Groups have evolved their own rules and regulations to guide problem solving and conflict resolution. Decisions made by committees have been followed up by action. This includes locking up of pumps, allowing members to pay in kind, dropping ineffective committee members, denying access to non-paying members and penalizing households that do not carry out mutually agreed upon duties such as cleaning pump surroundings on an assigned day.

As groups have gained confidence and a sense of efficacy they have increasingly used extension workers as resources. This has included asking for additional information, training or guidance in involving particularly persistent problems. The interface between the water committees and project staff is the source of two-way information flow between project staff and people in communities.

At the agency level, working groups within each section meet regularly to monitor, evaluate and adjust strategies to ensure effectiveness. The highest committees, the project steering committees which include MOWD, KWAHO and donor representatives from Nairobi and the project management committee now include the KWAHO senior staff member. These committees also meet regularly and function to support project staff in problem solving. In order to ensure long-term sustainability, the project needs to move closer to and work within the regular MOWD mechanisms.

National staff and expanded programmes (replicability)

The project is managed by competent Kenyan staff and includes local people recruited from the Kwale region with occasional technical assistance. The project has expanded beyond the first experimental stages to cover an entire district.

Other impact

KWAHO's crucial role in operationalizing the community involvement approach and ability to work with government technicians has increased government and donor support for its involvement in water programmes. The Ministry of Water Development strongly supports KWAHO and has nominated KWAHO as the principle NGO with which it works. William Draper III, Administrator, UNDP and Barber Conable, Chief, IBRD, among other dignitaries have both personally visited the Kwale project. Subsequently, they have both emphasized the importance of involvement of communities and NGOs in water supply programmes of their own agencies.

In 1986, SIDA recognized KWAHO's involvement in the Kwale project as the single most positive development of the project that year. SIDA has applied the Kwale experiences to guiding its policy in other provinces in Kenya. KWAHO's services are now in demand by 15 donors. In 1987, KWAHO also won an international UNIFEM award in recognition of its work in Kwale.

Government and donor experience in working with a small national NGO has led to greater understanding of the problems of NGOs and a commitment to policy change in support to NGOs.

UNDP has taken the unusual step in pledging support for the institution-building of KWAHO, a step which is expected to be a precedent for other NGOs. PROWESS and UNIFEM have developed an innovative proposal for provision of 'core funds' on a declining basis over a three-year period. The proposal includes training in financial management and assistance in crystalizing policies to ensure that KWAHO consolidates as an institution (Deepa Narayan-Parker, 1988).

C. Conclusions and suggestions

Kwale was successful because it was allowed to be successful, it was allowed to change, to evolve and grow over an extended period of time. Even though sustainability and replicability cannot yet be assumed, the Kwale experience highlights processes and factors that are important in creating programmes that are sustainable and replicable. These include overall project design issues and specific project component issues.

Project design

Kwale succeeded because it achieved a partnership between agencies and because the programme was allowed to evolve and grow. Partnership was possible because of a shared conviction of the centrality of community involvement in project success. This was assisted by a focus on one shared overriding goal, achieving 'sustained functioning of community-owned water systems'. The project design played an important role in attaining partnership and in evolution and growth of the programme.

(a) Partnership

Kwale was able to achieve partnership between government and NGO, between a number of donor agencies and most importantly between the government and local communities. This partnership was based on mutual respect, shared decision-making, two-way information exchange, negotiations and defined responsibilities. No partner dictated to others what needed to be done. Each partner gave of their best.

(b) Evolution and growth

Evolution and growth was evidenced not only within the overall programme but within each project component. A hand-pump testing project became an integrated water supply and sanitation (WSS) project. A training of women in hand-pump maintenance became training of 'whoever was most available and committed' to repairing hand-pumps. This included men.

Within the programme, need for change was not viewed as a sign of failure. Change is inevitable in programmes whose success depends on achieving a 'fit' to people's needs. Change was based on learning from experience. Evolving effective strategies takes time. This time period can be decreased by conducting applied social and technical research prior to implementation. Constant monitoring of defined indicators is important. Once effective strategies have emerged, they must be increasingly routinized and institutionalized. Only then should programmes attempt to expand.

(c) Role of project design

In the early stages the project evolved and grew primarily because of the personalities of the individuals involved. In the later stages, the project continued to evolve primarily because of the direction provided by the project document. Personalities became secondary.

Sustainability and replicability cannot be achieved if the success of a project is completely dependent on individuals involved. Personalities cannot be replicated. Project documents, a manifestation of project design, can be replicated.

The Kwale experience highlights the total inappropriateness of the 'blueprint' approach, a framework which assumes that all is known and predictable before a project begins. The blueprint approach cannot be applied to projects which aim to plan, implement and evaluate together with local communities. Instead, what is needed for low-cost community-based integrated water supply and sanitation programmes is an alternative framework that:

- gives people and community management a central place;
- identifies an overriding shared goal, 'effective and social personnel;'
- integrates one overriding goal with supportive management and organizational tasks and functions;
- defines the manager's role as designer of a 'learning environment';
- makes two-way information flow a central management task; and facilitates inter-agency co-operation and collaboration.

(d) Integrated rural development

The Kwale project is yet a clear demonstration of how the various needs of the community can be meaningfully responded to through the use of the most pressing sector as the focal point. In this case, water for health formed the initial basis from which women's and community development have sprung to increase and reinforce literacy and adult education, income generation, agricultural, environmental and other development activities. The people of Kwale narrate with confidence how their economic and social welfare has improved in recent years.

This and other projects in the country have gone a long way towards creating the confidence needed by government, NGOs and communities that development is possible in spite of the intervening difficult economic circumstances.

Even as the Government announced measures of cost-sharing in such areas as health, education, etc., communities such as Kwale are already used to putting up their own contribution voluntarily for their own benefit. They already know that this is what accelerates the achievement of their development goals.

Mobilization for popular participation

Having recognized the importance of popular participation in the recovery and development in Africa, there is need to address the process of mobilizing people's participation. The Kwale experience shows that it will not happen

automatically. While left to themselves, grass-roots communities have always evolved basic survival mechanisms, most communities have welcomed new ideas that are not disruptive to their social organization, value systems and within their means. Approaches by outsiders have therefore to be carefully considered if they are to attract community responsiveness.

(a) Traditionally government officials have been trained to deliver and issue directives, to provide and assume leadership. The idea of training officials for motivating the people and generating community initiative is fairly new. Even as we debate the merits of popular participation, a whole generation of government officials are still being trained and oriented towards the top-down approach and relationship so common between governments and communities.

The need then arises to retrain to re-orientate government officials, donor representatives and NGO field workers so that they can begin to appreciate, respect and encourage the people's initiative. For popular participation to succeed, the developmental agents must see themselves more as motivators and facilitators rather than initiators or service donors. This is especially important where it concerns the identification and initiation of a project. Unless the people regard a project as their project right from its initial stages, popular participation will be at best half-hearted and in many cases the project will be doomed right from the start.

(b) The value of community effort is entrenched in most non-industrial societies. So when at independence Kenyatta's leadership came up with the national motto "Harambee" it was reaching out for and harnessing that driving force deep down in the community. Also when at the same time Kenyatta told the people "hakuna cha bure" - do not expect anything for free - he at once dealt a fatal blow to the top-down philosophy and at the same time galvanized the people's will and energy to start self-help projects and co-operatives. The few who could go it alone did while the majority found that by coming together and forming 'Harambee' groups they were able to achieve more than they would even have done individually.

(c) In those areas where for various reasons the community appears to lack the drive or motivation necessary for initiating community projects it will be necessary for the Government or NGOs to use innovative strategies for motivation. One effective way of doing this is by giving people the opportunity to visit areas with successful community projects and see for themselves and exchange ideas with those involved. Inter-group and inter-regional visits facilitate exchange of experiences and enrichment in knowledge beyong the capacity of any one individual mobilizer. In this regard, Kenya offers a wide variety of successful community projects of which the people involved are very proud and from which others can gain motivation.

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